

APPENDIX 25—VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Visual resource management (VRM) is the system by which the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) classifies and manages scenic values and visual quality of public lands (BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1, Appendix C). The system is based on research that has produced ways of assessing the natural attributes of the landscape in objective terms. After inventory and evaluation, lands are given visual ratings (management classes) that determine the amount of modification allowed to the basic elements of the landscape.

INVENTORY AND EVALUATION OF VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The visual resource inventory process (BLM Handbook 8410-1) provides BLM managers with a means for determining visual values. The inventory consists of a scenic quality evaluation, sensitivity level analysis, and a delineation of distance zones. Based on these three factors, BLM-administered lands are placed into one of four visual resource inventory classes. These inventory classes represent the relative value of the visual resource.

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLASSES

VRM classes represent the degree of acceptable visual change within a characteristic landscape. A class is based on the physical and sociological characteristics of any given homogeneous area and serves as a management objective. The four classes are described below.

Class I

- Preserves the existing character of the landscape
- Provides for natural ecological changes only
- Does not preclude very limited management activity
- Allows only an extremely low level of change to the characteristic landscape that must not attract attention
- Includes primitive areas, wilderness study areas, some natural areas, some Wild and Scenic Rivers, and other similar areas where landscape modification activities should be restricted.

Class II

- Retains the existing character of the landscape
- Allows management activities to be seen; however, activities should not attract the attention of the casual observer
- Requires changes to repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape
- Requires modifications to a proposal if the proposed change cannot be adequately mitigated to retain the character of the landscape.

Class III

- Partially retains the existing character of the landscape
- Requires that areas where a management activity causes changes in the basic elements (form, line, color, or texture) do not dominate the view of the casual observer
- Requires that changes remain subordinate to the visual strength of the existing character.

Class IV

- Allows management activities to dominate the view and remain the major focus of viewer attention
- Allows areas where changes are subordinate to the original composition and character; however, these changes should reflect what could be a natural occurrence within the characteristic landscape.